

**Remarks**

***Specification***

The objection to the abstract of the disclosure is considered to be overcome by the attached amended abstract which eliminates reference to the claims. Entry of the amended abstract and removal of the objection is respectfully requested.

***Claim Rejections 35 U.S.C. § 102***

Claims 1-4 and 10 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,017,495 to Ljungmann ("Ljungmann" hereafter). Applicants have canceled claims 1 and 2, re-presented claims 3 and 10 in independent form, have amended claim 4 to depend from claim 3, and have added new claim 11.

In view of the Examiner's rejections of claims 1-4, Applicants point out that the present invention as claimed in amended claim 3 includes an oven housing comprising an air distributor. The distributor functions specifically to direct the heated air into the melting containers via several openings in the walls and/or floor of the melting containers. The heating apparatus of Ljungmann has no such means for distribution of warm air. The distributor of the present invention therefore provides an advantage over Ljungmann because directing the heated air to the melting containers helps prevent unintentional warming of reagents which can cause wasteful evaporation, as in paragraph [0023] of the present application. Amended claim 4, which now depends from amended claim 3 as presented herein, includes the limitation of a controller for adjusting the temperature in the melting container(s), a feature not suggested in the prior art. Accordingly, Applicants consider claims 3 and 4 in condition for allowance.

Claim 10 has been re-written in independent form. Applicants respectfully point out that there is nothing in the cited references that discloses or suggests a heating station configured as a retrofittable separate module for the automatic stainer. Thus, Applicants consider claim 10 in condition for allowance.

New claim 11 includes an air discharge system for further reduction of heat that can cause unintentional evaporation of reagents in non-melting compartments, as explained in

paragraph [0023] of the present specification. This limitation provides an additional advantage over Ljungmann and is not taught in the other cited prior art. Applicants therefore consider claim 11 in condition for allowance.

***Allowable Subject Matter***

Applicants appreciate the Examiner's indication that claims 5-9 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base and intervening claims. Accordingly, Applicants have re-written claims 5 and 6 in independent form; claims 7-9 depend from claim 6. Therefore, and believe amended claims 5-9 are thought to be in condition for allowance.

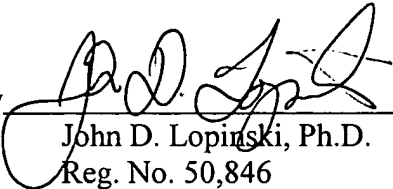
***Conclusion***

In view of the foregoing, favorable reconsideration of Claims 3-11 and removal of the stated rejection is respectfully sought. If the Examiner has any questions, or if any information is needed to assist in expediting prosecution of the instant application, the undersigned attorney may be contacted at the number provided below.

Respectfully submitted,

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DATED: August 19, 2003